(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization

International Bureau



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(43) International Publication Date 17 February 2005 (17.02.2005)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number WO 2005/015124 A1

(51) International Patent Classification⁷:

G01B 11/24,

(21) International Application Number:

PCT/GB2004/003066

(22) International Filing Date:

14 July 2004 (14.07.2004)

(25) Filing Language:

English

(26) Publication Language:

English

(30) Priority Data: 0316916.6

18 July 2003 (18.07.2003) GE

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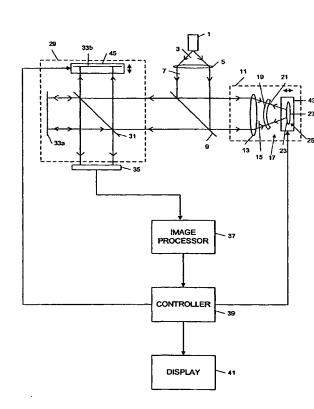
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- (81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NA, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW.
- (84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM),

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: SURFACE PROFILING METHOD AND APPARATUS



(57) Abstract: There is described a surface profiling apparatus in which light from a broadband light source (1) is directed to an interference zone along first and second light paths, the first light path including the non-planar sample surface (23) and the second light path including a reference surface (21). The light travelling along the first light path comprises a sample light beam having wavefronts which vary along the direction of propagation. The sample surface (23) is moved through the sample light beam so that at different positions of the sample surface along the direction of propagation, different regions of the sample surface (23) substantially match a wavefront of the sample light beam. As this movement of the sample surface (23) causes a variation in the optical path lengths of the first and second light paths, the apparatus includes means for compensating for differences between the optical path lengths so that light from portions of the sample surface (23) which substantially match a wavefront of the sample light beam and light from corresponding portions of the reference surface (21) produce an interference pattern in the interference zone.

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European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

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